

Preliminary Evidence for Multiple Reanalysis and Replacement in Rapanui Settlement Traditions

Steven Roger Fischer

The hypothesis that Rapanui's founding father Hotu Matu'a might be a recent borrowing of Mangareva's founding father 'Atu Motua is tantamount to heresy in Rapanui studies. However, the possibility of a recent borrowing of the name Hotu Matu'a seems to be implicit in the single-settlement model for Rapanui. This is the model which many, but certainly not all scholars of Rapanui prehistory currently endorse. It holds that Rapanui was settled in the first few centuries A.D. by one voyaging canoe of East Polynesians probably hailing from the Marquesas; allegedly, this was the only human arrival at the island until Roggeveen's on Easter Day 1722 (Kirch 1984:266-8; Bahn and Flenley 1992:81; Fischer 1992:181-90). This settlement model will not permit us to accept that Hotu Matu'a came to Rapanui in the first few centuries A.D. from Mangareva, which was not settled until around A.D. 1100 (Bellwood 1978). And because the two names Hotu Matu'a and 'Atu Motua are not shared by any other East Polynesian island or island group, they were evidently not known in the period of "East Polynesian regional unity" which presumably lasted from ca 400 B.C. to, at the latest, A.D. 300 (Kirch 1986:28-9; Fischer 1992:182). The logic of the single-settlement model for Rapanui, then, would seemingly force us to conclude that Rapanui's Hotu Matu'a would be a recent borrowing of Mangareva's founding father 'Atu Motua.

However, this model of a single settlement of Rapanui has not been scientifically proved. Nor has the synonymy of the names Hotu Matu'a and 'Atu Motua been established.

Let us briefly consider this last point. From the 1860s to 1880s there was no standard spelling of the name that only became orthographically fixed as Hotu Matu'a after 1886 (Roussel 1926E18693:357-8; Gana, in Silva 1903:31; de Lapelin 1872:108-9, fn.1; Philippi 1873:399; Palmer 1875:292; Jaussen 1886:95 and 1893:3; Clark 1899:145; Cooke 1899:705; Alexander n.d.:3; Thomson 1891:468,526). The original form of this name is unclear. The many contrasting spellings point to an original Hotu, Hatu, or even 'Atu with an appended Rapanui Matu'a or Mangarevan Motua. The linguistic evidence is too inconclusive to prove the hypothesis of a recent Rapanui borrowing of the name Hotu Matu'a. At best, it indicates that several forms of the name Hotu Matu'a were in use at the same time on the island; hence, we also cannot say that Hotu Matu'a was the one, correct form either. Perhaps the confusion itself is our best indication that we might be dealing here with a recent loan. If Hotu Matu'a were a recent loan, there is only one other island that could have furnished the name: Mangareva.

In the middle of the 19th century, 'Atu Motua or "Paternal Lord" was considered on Mangareva to be the first of the three "uncreated" deities who stood above all others, also the first king of Mangareva who commenced all *ariki* genealogies but who himself knew no beginning (Métraux, in Laval 1938: 2,296-7, fn.144,329; Caillot 1914:153; Buck, in

Laval 1938: xxviii).

Could the Mangarevan name 'Atu Motua have arrived at Rapanui in the recent past? Aboard the vessel *Favorite* that brought the Catholic missionaries Father Hippolyte Roussel and Brother Eugene Eyraud in March 1866 in order to establish Rapanui's first permanent mission (until 1871) were three Mangarevan proselytes, the only other non-Rapanui on the island (Laval 1968:459; van Hoorebeeck 1979:88). It is indeed possible that these three Mangarevans could have introduced their founding father 'Atu Motua to the Rapanui people at this time.

If the hypothesis of a Rapanui borrowing of the name Hotu Matu'a from Mangareva is valid, there would certainly have been here on Rapanui a traditional figure filling the "slot" later assumed by Mangareva's 'Atu Motua in the island's settlement traditions, either an original or elaborated "founding father" figure. There is fragmentary evidence for such a figure in autochthonous Rapanui settlement tradition. His name: Tu'u ko Iho.

Before any mention of an 'Atu, Hatu, Hotu, or Hutu the Rapanui gave testimony that their founding father was called T'u ku Ihu or Tu'u ko Iho (Palmer 1870a,b,c; Sainthill 1870:453). Indeed, a chronological survey of the earliest citations of the name Tu'u ko Iho on Rapanui reveals a clear progression from preeminence, to shared prominence, to suppression, to oblivion. This might be interpreted as a gradual process of oral fragmentation evidencing the intrusive effect of a recent cultural borrowing.

Palmer (1870 a,b,c) in 1868 registered only Tu'u ko Iho as Rapanui's founding father. Gana (Silva 1903:31) in 1870 cited Hatu and Tu'u ko Iho as one and the same figure. However, by 1872 the hypothetical replacement of indigenous Tu'u ko Iho with Mangareva's 'Atu Motua might have been complete. For in 1872 we find heading Admiral de Lapelin's 'ariki list (1872:109) which he had collected on Tahiti from resident Rapanui only the name Hotumotua, with no mention now of Tu'u ko Iho.

The German Paymaster Weisser witnessed on Rapanui in 1882-- or 11 years after the single surviving Mangarevan had left--only the name Ta-ku-ihu (Tu'u ko Iho) as that of the island's "first immigrant" according to then-current island tradition (Geiseler 1883:1). The name 'Atu/Hatu/Hotu/Hutu is not mentioned in Weisser's data. This suggests that the Rapanui might have temporarily returned to an original island settlement tradition once the surviving Mangarevan had gone.

Some three dozen of those ca 400 Rapanui (the exact figure is unknown) who had left for Tahiti and Mangareva in 1871 returned to Rapanui in the 1880s, perhaps reintroducing Hotu Matu'a to the island: the name was witnessed here in various forms by the USS *Mohican* in 1886 (Thomson 1891; Cooke 1899; Alexander n.d.). Thomson (1891:474) heard from the Tahitian Alexander Salmon that "Hotu-Matua is said to have landed upon the island with three hundred followers in

two canoes." This information must be weighed against the data of Palmer (1870c:180), who in 1868 had noted that Tu'u ko Iho had landed with a "swarm" of followers. Roussel (1926:357), in 1869, had penned that Hotu had arrived with 400 in two canoes. Gana (Philippi 1873: 399), in 1870, had learned that Hatu/Tu'u ko Iho had landed in two large canoes each holding 400 persons, making 800 settlers. Apparently at this juncture, with Salmon's personal interpretations and with the returnees' traditions mixing with those of the few Rapanui who had remained on the island, Rapanui's pre-missionary settlement traditions had become more than a little confused.

Of the two names Hotu Matu'a and Tu'u ko Iho, only Tu'u ko Iho would be indigenous Rapanui—that is, if Hotu Matu'a is indeed a loan translation of Mangareva's 'Atu Motua. This is because Tu'u ko Iho preserves an original, inherited theonym, from Proto-Polynesian *tu9u 'stand, be upright, erect.' The autochthony of an original Rapanui Tu'u is substantiated also by the fact that in prehistoric times the Tu'u comprised the western *hanau* or descent group (the eastern were the 'Otu 'Iti). It could well be that the Tu'u were named after the conjectured East Polynesian fatherhead Tu'u ko Iho. The name Hotu Matu'a, on the other hand, is not associated with either island *hanau* or with any *mata* 'tribe.'

The so-called "Hotuiti tribe" derives its name from the *hanau* of the 'otu 'Iti, with an original initial glottal stop in 'Otu that was replaced by an *h* near the end of the 19th century.

Furthermore, numerous Rapanui toponyms include the name Ma'unga Tu'u (Mt. Tu'u) located in Tu'u territory alongside Ma'unga Tangaroa. The name Hotu Matu'a, though held to be that of Rapanui's founding father, comprises not one island toponym. This, too, evidences a recent borrowing.

Should we finally entertain the hypothesis that Rapanui's alleged founding father Hotu Matu'a indeed might be a recent Mangarevan loan that replaced Rapanui's earlier fatherhead Tu'u ko Iho, then of course we must pose the question: who is this Tu'u ko Iho who appears to have played such an important role in prehistoric Rapanui culture? In other words, is there evidence that would justify our attributing to this hitherto generally ignored figure of Rapanui legend such a preeminent status in early island history?

There is reason to believe that Rapanui's Tu'u ko Iho is no one less than the great East Polynesian ancestral figure or deity *Tu'u, later Tū, perhaps East Polynesia's supreme deity at the time of initial dispersion from the conjectured Marquesan "group homeland" approximately 2,000 years ago. If there were an ancient Polynesian deity who should be chosen as Rapanui's potential fatherhead candidate, then in light of the earliest known East Polynesian traditions Tu'u would have to figure among one's first choices.

However, this is not all. Rapanui preserves together with Tu'u the strange epithet "ko Iho," the Iho, a compound form of the deity's name that is attested nowhere else in East Polynesia. What does this epithet signify and what does the compounding imply? I am of the opinion that ko Iho identifies Tu'u as "the Pith" or, metaphorically, "the Sublime" and reveals that at the time of initial East Polynesian dispersion around 2,000 years ago "Tu'u the Sublime" was the name of the supreme ancestral figure or deity of the Polynesians

inhabiting the islands in and around the Marquesas.

There is evidence to support this claim. It is appreciated that the name "Iho" might well have been the ancient East Polynesian pendant—if only in an analogical sense—to the ancient Hebrews' "Yahweh," the Ineffable Moerenhout (1837: I:443) noted on Tahiti that of the superior gods, each represented an attribute of the one Supreme Being Ihoiho or Ta'aroa. Bovis (1909:45) wrote on Tahiti: "In the beginning there was nothing but the god Ihoiho." Tregear (1891:106) identified Io as "God, the Supreme Being" of the Maori people and called Io "the ineffable name." Pointing to the fact that Sir George Grey spelled Io as Iho-o-te-rangi, Tregear (1904:456) claimed the pronunciation Iho to be more proper, since it corresponds to Tahitian Iho. "The most ancient Maori prayers were addressed to Io," wrote Handy (1927:96). Handy (1927:97) called the cult of Io/Iho "truly an ancient feature in the Polynesian religion." For Handy, Iho was a "supreme god" (1927:95). In the Marquesas, Iho is considered the grandfather of Makemake (Kurze 1993).

On Rapanui, Tu'u ko Iho appears to combine the East Polynesians' ancestral figure or deity Tu'u and their alleged "Supreme Being" Iho. This remarkable compounding, if inherited, implies that, at least at the time of the Rapanui's departure from the Marquesan "group homeland," the Supreme Being Iho not only was identified with the dominant figure of the East Polynesian pantheon, the war god Tu'u, but Iho also comprised an epithet of this greatest of the early East Polynesian ancestral figures or deities Tu'u.

Why was Tu'u ko Iho not venerated as a deity on Rapanui? Perhaps he once had been, during the initial settlement period. But this cult would doubtless have weakened over the alleged 1,700-odd years of isolation of the Rapanui people.

Conclusion

The evidence very briefly set forth here suggests that there may have been two successive occurrences of replacement in Rapanui settlement traditions. In each, an original static tradition would have been called into question, prompting a reanalysis, whose reflexes we detect only fragmentarily.

According to this scenario, the Supreme Being brought to Rapanui by the original settlers from their alleged Marquesan "group homeland" around 2,000 years ago—whose name may have been Tu'u ko Iho or "Tu'u the Sublime"—would, in some later prehistorical period on Rapanui, have experienced a "demotion" from mythical to legendary status; his position was filled at this time by Makemake. Herēupon Tu'u ko Iho's name eventually replaced that of the historical leader of the settlers, which had been forgotten, confused, or purposely subordinated in island genealogies. One might suggest that this earliest hypothetical occurrence of reanalysis and replacement of Rapanui settlement tradition took place at an extremely troubled period in early island history. Further, this first reanalysis and replacement may be understood as being a dynamic innovation, that is, a social revivification in which the conscious selection of a new deity (or epithet of the old) is meant actively to assist in the overcoming of a specific social crisis. That this selection was later deemed successful by the Rapanui might be seen in the fact that Makemake thereafter remained the island's premier deity and Tu'u ko Iho remained

its legendary first settler apparently until missionary contact in the 1860s. Nevertheless, fragments, historical "ripples" of Tu'u ko Iho's original deity status—creator of the *moai*, transporter of the *moai*, royal patron of 'Orongo—were still recalled well into the 20th century.

A second hypothetical occurrence of reanalysis and replacement in island settlement traditions might have been in the 1860s, when the Rapanui faced imminent extinction and possibly adopted a neighboring East Polynesian settlement tradition. If this occurred, Tu'u ko Iho then lost his acquired legendary status to Mangareva's founding father 'Atu Motua—who on Easter Island eventually came to be known as Hotu Matu'a—in a sudden jettisoning of ancient inheritance in the face of an annihilating European and, above all, East Polynesian intrusion.

One can assume that this second hypothetical occurrence was not a dynamic process; that is, it was not a conscious attempt by the Rapanui to join the rest of East Polynesia, for example. Rather, it would have been the desperate submission of a broken people—confronted with depopulation, pandemics, and Christianity. Replacing Rapanui's Tu'u ko Iho with Mangareva's 'Atu Motua in 1868-69 would, then, effectively have marked the end of a nearly 2,000-year process of devolving veneration of Tu'u ko Iho. It would also have signaled, perhaps more than anything else, the death of ancient Rapanui culture.

Palmer (1870b:110) was told in 1868—

... at his death [Tu'u ko Iho] disappeared from earth in the form of a butterfly (called *purupuru*), and the small people now call, on seeing these insects, which are not very common, "Tookooioo! Tookooioo!"

There is no hint as to his reappearance.

The once "ineffable" Tu'u ko Iho had been reduced by 1868 to a mere children's rhyme. The great and terrible Proto-East Polynesian god of war Tu'u had metamorphosed into a harmless butterfly. The ultimate monolithic statue of Easter Island—indeed, the *moai*'s traditional creator and mover—did not topple, but silently fluttered away. The allegory became complete: there was nowhere to go but oblivion.

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